

Meeting Date: March 8, 2007

Agenda Item No. 15

Agenda Item: Yellowstone Cutthroat Plan

Bureau Chief Approval: _____

Prepared by: Scott A. Grunder, Fishery Program Coordinator, Fisheries Bureau

Background: Due to a variety of factors, Yellowstone cutthroat trout have declined across their historic range in the western United States. In Idaho, Yellowstone cutthroat trout occupy 61% of their historical range. The Fisheries Bureau has prepared a Management Plan for the Conservation of Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout in Idaho. This plan summarizes historical and current information on Yellowstone cutthroat trout throughout its range in Idaho. The plan describes their status with respect to abundance, trends, genetics, and an evaluation of land and water management effects on the subspecies. We present management strategies and conservation actions to increase the persistence of Yellowstone cutthroat trout across Idaho. Previously, the Commission was briefed on the population status of Yellowstone cutthroat trout in Idaho based on a statewide survey conducted by the Department from 1999-2003. In January 2007, the Commission was briefed on the conservation actions the Department intends to pursue as part of implementing this management plan. The Commission granted approval to take the plan out for public review. This presentation will provide an overview of the agency and public comments received on the management plan and Department disposition of those comments. The Fisheries Bureau seeks Commission approval of the Yellowstone cutthroat trout management plan.

Statutory Authority and/or Policy Issues: The Management Plan for the Conservation of Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout in Idaho describes how the Department intends to manage and conserve this important game fish as per its mission found in Idaho Code Section 36-103. The Department's strategic plan has a goal to "Improve public understanding of and involvement in fish and wildlife management." This plan sets management direction and goals for conservation of Yellowstone cutthroat trout. The Commission sets policy and provides direction, considers input from the public, and has the authority to adopt, amend, or reject Department-recommended plans. The Fisheries Bureau solicited public and agency comments on the management plan. Having done that and incorporating comments as appropriate, the Fisheries Bureau is seeking Commission adoption of the Yellowstone cutthroat trout management plan.

Public Involvement Process: Following the January 2007 Commission meeting, the Department posted the Yellowstone cutthroat trout management plan on its website and issued a news release notifying the public and agency partners that our plan was ready for review. Mr. Grunder made personal contacts soliciting comment on the plan. Additionally, regional staff issued news releases, held open houses, and personally notified conservation partners about our management plan. We accepted comments on the plan through February 28, 2007.

Staff Recommendation: The Fisheries Bureau is seeking Commission action to adopt the Management Plan for Conservation of Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout in Idaho as an official Department species management plan.

Justification: Fisheries Bureau staff have been working on this management plan for several years in response to repeated attempts by organized groups to petition the federal government to list Yellowstone cutthroat trout under the Endangered Species Act. We believe this management plan offers the best available scientific information and necessary conservation action that will allow the Department to effectively manage, conserve, and protect this subspecies in Idaho.